VOICES OF THE STONES

A. E.

A. R. Birley.

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VOICES OF THE STONES

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
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VOICES OF THE STONES

by A. E.

"The shining rock
From which arise a hundred strains."
The Voyage of Bran.

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TO PADRAIC COLUM

I MADE *these verses in a rocky land,*
And I have named them Voices of the Stones,
Although they do not keep that innocence
Was shed on me when quiet made me kin
To the cold immobile herd. All things have
changed
From primal nature save these stones: all things
Since Eden, bird and beast and fin, have
strayed
Far from that shining garden of His thought:
We also. Only the humble stones have kept
Their morning starriness of purity
Immutable. Being unfallen they breathe
Only unfallen life; and with my cheek
Pressed to their roughness I had part regained
My morning starriness, and made these songs
Half from the hidden world and half from this.

OUTCAST

Sometimes when alone
At the dark close of day,
Men meet an outlawed majesty
And hurry away.

They come to the lighted house;
They talk to their dear;
They crucify the mystery
With words of good cheer.

When love and life are over,
And flight's at an end,
On the outcast majesty
They lean as a friend.

EXILES

The gods have taken alien shapes upon them,
Wild peasants driving swine
In a strange country. Through the swarthy faces
The starry faces shine.

Under grey tattered skies they strain and reel there:
Yet cannot all disguise
The majesty of fallen gods, the beauty,
The fire beneath their eyes.

They huddle at night within low, clay-built cabins;
And, to themselves unknown,
They carry with them diadem and sceptre
And move from throne to throne.

ARTISTRY

To bring this loveliness to be,
  Even for an hour, the Builder must
Have wrought in the laboratory
  Of many a star for its sweet dust.

Oh, to make possible that heart
  And that gay breath so lightly sighed:
What agony was in the art!
  How many gods were crucified!

MUTINY

THAT blazing galleon the sun,
This dusky coracle I ride,
Both under secret orders sail,
And swim upon the selfsame tide.

The fleet of stars, my boat of soul,
By perilous magic mountains pass,
Or lie where no horizons gleam
Fainting upon a sea of glass.

Come, break the seals and tell us now
Upon what enterprise we roam:
To storm what city of the gods,
Or—sail for the green fields of home!

JEALOUSY

Youth met within a garden,
And youth to youth revealed
Time's loveliest hidden secrets,
Things that were dead and sealed:

What domes of ivory wonder
Rose in the golden race:
What heavens were fabled o'er them—
For some face like this face.

Youth roamed by shore and mountain
And its new wisdom told:
But earth and sea were silent,
Their lovely faces cold.

A HOLY HILL

Be still: be still: nor dare
  Unpack what you have brought,
Nor loosen on this air
  Red gnomes of your thought.

Uncover: bend the head
  And let the feet be bare;
This air that thou breathest
  Is holy air.

Sin not against the Breath,
  Using ethereal fire
To make seem as faery
  A wanton desire.

Know that this granite height
  May be a judgement throne,
Dread thou the unmoveable will,
  The wrath of stone.

TIME

At every heart-beat
Through the magic day
A lovely laughing creature
Ran away.
Where have they wandered,
The flock so gay?

I had but looked on them
And away they ran,
The exquisite lips untouched.
As they began
To part, Time swept them
On his caravan.

These new-born beauties
The tyrant took.
Their gaze was on mine
And mine forsook.
I could not stay even
One lovely look.

In what fold are they?
Could I pursue

Through the Everliving
And know anew
All those golden motions
That were you?

Were beauty only
A day the same,
We could know the Maker
And name His name.
We would know the substance
Was holy flame.

Is there an oasis
Where Time stands still,
Where the fugitive beauty
Stays as we will?
Is there an oasis
Where Time stands still?

SURVIVAL

WHAT pent-up fury in those arms,
Red gilded by the sun's last breath!
The spade along the ridges runs
As if it had a race with death.

The clods fly right: the clods fly left:
The ridges rise on either side,
The tireless fury is not spent,
Though the fierce sunset long has died.

The strength which tossed the hills on high,
And rent the stormy seas apart,
Is still within those mighty limbs,
Still stirs the dreams of that wild heart.

RESURRECTION

Not by me these feet were led
  To the path beside the wave,
Where the naiad lilies shed
  Moonfire o'er a lonely grave.

Let the dragons of the past
  In their caverns sleeping lie.
I am dream-betrayed, and cast
  Into that old agony.

And an anguish of desire
  Burns as in the sunken years,
And the soul sheds drops of fire
  All unquenchable by tears.

I, who sought on high for calm,
  In the Everliving find
All I was in what I am,
  Fierce with gentle intertwined;

Hearts which I had crucified
  With my heart that tortured them;
Penitence, unfallen pride—
  These my thorny diadem!

Thou would'st ease in heaven thy pain,
  Oh, thou fiery, bleeding thing!
All thy wounds will wake again
  At the heaving of a wing.

All thy dead with thee shall rise,
  Dies Irae. If the soul
To the Everliving flies,
  There shall meet it at the goal

Love that Time had overlaid,
  Deaths that we again must die—
Let the dragons we have made
  In their caverns sleeping lie.

FORLORN

My wisdom crumbles.
I am as a lone child.
Oh, had I the heart now
My weeping were wild.

My palace dwindles
Thin into air:
The Ancient Darkness
Is everywhere:

But the heart is gone
That could understand,
And the child is dead
That had taken Its hand.

RESCUE

How deep the night about that soul!
How fast the manacles! I brood
And recreate in my own heart
Its agony of solitude.

Have golden lips breathed in that dark?
And was the breath as vainly blown
As yon frail wind that trembles on
This mammoth herd of brutish stone?

A kinsman of the cherubim
Chained in this pit's abysmal mire!
Sound for the rescue! Bugles, blow!
Gird on the armoury of fire!

TRANSIENCE

Why does my fancy soon forsake
All that is perfect to the eye,
The ruffled silver of the lake,
The silent silver of the sky,
Its single star that is so shy,
That trembles like a golden fawn
Strayed from the blue and shadowy wood
Of night upon the twilight lawn:
Why is the heart so soon withdrawn?
Even on earth's last lovely brood
Of primroses it hardly dwells,
Though myriads, a tender mist,
Warm the pale green of chilly dells,
The aftershine of amethyst,
The glades of midnight overhead,
Where browse the flocks the fawn has led,
All glimmering, till they are laid
Folden in light which is their shade—
Did ever earth from its first prime
Move to a lovelier dance than this?
But yet I cannot keep in chime.
Swift as the whirling dervish is

My heart floats on a swifter tide.
As one upon a hurrying stream
Sees towers and forests as in dream
Drift by him upon either side,
So do I see, and then I fly
From these to that they prophesy.

It is not that my heart is cold
To beauty, for my pulses beat
As bloom and odour jet their sweet
From tiny fountains in the mould,
And many rainbow trumpets blow;
But still my heart divines from these
How near are the Hesperides,
How rich to have this overflow
From sacred earth through common clay:
And all my being yearns to run,
To tread the meadows of the sun
And bask in that enchanted day.

The suns that rise, the suns that set,
Time's tidal waves of blue and gold
That roll from far ethereal seas,
Hill-land and forest, starlit pool,
Are images we soon forget,
And swiftest when most beautiful.
For when most beautiful we feel
That there is something they reveal,
Some lordlier being of their kind;
And beauty only meaneth this
And to the symbol we are blind.

The gifts that fortune brings, the kiss,
The lovely life, the heart unveiled,
Are images of heights unscaled.
And we adore while to our thought
Being with symbol seems enwrought,
Yet if we would the rapture stay,
The spirit is the open door
Through which the prisoner steals away.
Maybe there is a native shore
For us, for it, where we may find
A beauty stedfast to the mind,
Joy that will not so lightly stray
To join the maskers in the dance,
Eternity with Time at play.

A MOUNTAIN WIND

The cold limbs of the air
Brush by me on the hill,
Climb to the utmost crag,
Leap out, then all is still.

Ah, but what high intent
In the cold will of wind;
What sceptre would it grasp
To leave these dreams behind!

Trail of celestial things:
White centaurs, winged in flight,
Through the fired heart sweep on,
A hurricane of light.

I have no plumes for air:
Earth hugs to it my bones.
Leave me, O sky-born powers,
Brother to grass and stones.

PROMISE

Be not so desolate
Because thy dreams have flown
And the hall of the heart is empty
And silent as stone,
As age left by children
Sad and alone.

Those delicate children,
Thy dreams, still endure:
All pure and lovely things
Wend to the Pure.
Sigh not: unto the fold
Their way was sure.

Thy gentlest dreams, thy frailest,
Even those that were
Born and lost in a heart-beat,
Shall meet thee there.
They are become immortal
In shining air.

The unattainable beauty
The thought of which was pain,

That flickered in eyes and on lips
And vanished again:
That fugitive beauty
Thou shalt attain.

The lights innumerable
That led thee on and on,
The Masque of Time ended,
Shall glow into one.
It shall be with thee for ever
Thy travel done.

ABUNDANCE

Like grey mastodon
  Upon the mountain side
Rocks lay as if to guard
  Its austere pride.

All stone unto the eye:
  Yet is the heart at rest
As babe happed in cradle
  Or on the breast.

All that earth is,
  Mountain or solitude,
Was born out of pity
  And is milk for her brood.

ANCIENT

The sky is cold as pearl
Over a milk-white land.
The snow seems older than Time
Though it fell through a dreaming and
Will vanish itself as a dream
At the dimmest touch of a hand.

Out of a timeless world
Shadows fall upon Time,
From a beauty older than earth
A ladder the soul may climb.
I climb by the phantom stair
To a whiteness older than Time.

NATURAL MAGIC

From whence has flown this argosy of air
That o'er the forest dropped its merchandise,
Spilling a fire so rich, a wine so rare?
Through the long glade from russet floor to skies
Darkness and fire are revellers everywhere.
The leaves like gold and emerald butterflies
With myriad quiverings roof the forest glade.
Around me where I lie
The orange flames race through the tattered shade
Dazzling the downcast eye.

Downcast the eye; but not the heart within;
The aerial wine delights: the unblinding fire
Opens the ways, far past the leafy din
And revelry of light; by what desire
Borne onward through invisible gates to win
To that high region where unto one lyre,
Played by the Magian of the Beautiful,
The starry feet keep time,
And these last hyacinths in shadows cool
Echo with distant rhyme.

Distant! The wizard air has breathed away
The heaviness from earth. The sombre trees
To cloud change unimaginably; nay;
To fire, to mind. Ancestral images,
Ere that unfallen Eden had its day
Of yet undimmed forest and flower, these
Living and lustrous and ethereal shapes
I see with sight unblind,
In heavenly valleys or on glittering capes
Glowed in the Magian's mind.

They fade: the forest flickers round me now:
Once more the incessant birth and death of light
On russet floor, green leaf and burnished bough
Dazzle. Yet still the visionary sight
Holds faintly, as these thicker airs allow,
A magic mist of dancers pale and bright,
A foam of golden faces from the spheres
Beyond sun rise or set,
With eyes that had for long forgotten tears
Or never had been wet.

Vanished the angelic trees and beings all!
The wood darkens: the wind has ceased to fan
The glade to flame. Oh, it was magical!
Can I recall? The blinding sunlight ran
Over the burning hyacinth to fall

Starry upon yon water. So began
The incantation of the light which brought
Rapt face and fiery wing,
The Heaven of Heavens: a myriad marvel wrought
And from so slight a thing!

OLD WINE

The boys with their golden limbs
Shine out through the tawny glare.
They race, and after their heels
The shadows in purple flare.

They dance from the sand to the sea
And shatter its blue as they pass,
Till the tide is frothy with light
And glimmers with bubbles like glass.

And Michael, Rory and Teige
Are aglow with the Sun and the Wind;
For unto their rapturous youth
The ancient nurses are kind.

They drink the oldest of wine.
It sparkles like fire in their clay,
A Spirit breathed in the waters
Ere Time had buried a day.

ADVENTURE

The night is still as stone.
What wonder at its core
Lures the hot soul, a lone
Conquistador?

Is there a Fount of Youth,
An Eldorado there?
What may it find, what truth
In hollow air?

Yet from this waste it can
Bring back its golden hordes
Captive, its caravan
Of starry words.

NIGHT WIND

I LOVE to think this fragrant air
  I breathe in the deep-bosomed night
Has mixed with beauty, and may bear
  The burden of a heart's delight.

This may have been the burning breath
  That uttered Deirdre's love. It may
Have been a note outlasting death
  As Sappho sang her heart away.

It may have fanned a joy so deep
  That Ilium must pay the price,
And under desert sand must sleep
  Heroes and towers in sacrifice.

And this rich air, it may have been,—
  To bring these dreams, so sweet a throng.—
Sighed by the lovely listening queen
  While Solomon had sung his song.

So it will take from me, from thee,
  Ere from our being it departs,
And keep for lovers yet to be
  All the enchantment of our hearts.

IF

If not a plume may vanish out of air,
If all things living stand,
But by a will, and that withheld, we were
Less than a shifting sand—
Where in our being has the god its hold?
Where is the burning hand?

Where does the might that holds our frailty
Lie hidden? Oh, somewhere
A light shows where the hand is laid, will lead
Us by some lustrous stair
To find the god, take the invisible hand
And tread the starry air!

MAGNIFICENCE

Cloistered amid these austere rocks,
A brooding seer, I watched an hour,
Close to the earth, lost to all else,
The marvel of a tiny flower.

To build its palace walls of jade
What myriads toiled in dark and cold:
And what gay traders from the sun
Brought down its sapphire and its gold!

Oh, palace of the universe!
Oh, changing halls of day and night!
Does the high Builder dream in thee
With more of wonder and delight?

SNARES

I FAINT rememb'ring all that shook my will;
How the light outposts even of paradise
O'ercame me with the witchery of eyes
Or delicate magic of the lips: how still
A motion white and fugitive can thrill
With longings that are immortalities.
How, if the heart to these frail enemies
Yields, can it hope to scale the heavenly hill,
See beauty in its fulness, or endure
The last temptation, which is but seeing
The gorgeous shadow of all that is its own?
That mirrored majesty is the last lure
To hide from it its own immortal being.
Heaven lies between the spirit and its throne.

THE LOST OTHERS

You set your heart on Nancy.
You won your fancy, lad.
But love had never taught you
What other names she had,
Or what gay Naiad lent her grace,
What shining Oread.

You did not know what beauty
Thronged in that light disguise:
What eyes gazed out of Faery,
What Sibyl from the Wise,
What burning miracle her soul
Was in its native skies.

You won your pretty Nancy;
But she was all you had.
The starry women vanished.
A lonely lass and lad
Mutely upon each other gaze
Nor know why they are sad.

THE SOWER

After the sower with the seed
What mightier being strides behind,
Who from a fiery hand strews out
The elves of life upon the wind?

And every one becomes a slave
Labouring through earth from seed to sun,
Till the green pillar's thick with grain
And the long marvellous labour's done.

Ah, when the food is made for man,
The spirits that the scythe sets free:
Do they exult and do they fly,
Sower of Life, again to Thee?

CARRIERS

Those features that enchant you,
Light limbs that shine like air:
Be of one spell the master;
The coloured wisp may bear
Unto the Magic-Maker.
Yea, a wisp of dream will bear.

Too rich a freight may founder.
Imperial dreams go down.
For light must be the galleon
That shall not sink and drown.
Thin is the airy ocean.
Yea, a crumb of earth may drown.

They tell in sacred story
One caught a wisp of dream,
And saw in holy aether
A shining woman gleam,
The Usha, the Dawn Maiden;
Yea, the beauty beyond dream.

MOMENTARY

What Wizard at twilight
Made gay the light feet?
What Voice in their voices
Sounded so sweet?

Who whirled the children
Into His dream,
To sway with the boughs
And curve with the stream?

One dance in one mind
Were clouds in the air,
The rapturous feet,
The flicker of hair.

Too soon it was over
The magical hour.
They parted like leaves
From a withering flower.

The twilight thickened:
The moon rose pale,
And they ran to their homes
By the hill or the vale.

FOR REMEMBRANCE

We heard the accent of the King of Kings,
And in our memory of immortal things
We stored the prophets words. Oh, it was
wise.
Be you remembered, gay and lovely eyes!
Twin avatars of all that life desires,
The pure, the unimaginable fires,
Within the Mother's being. Oh, twin stars,
Be you remembered as those avatars,
The Wise revealers; for through you we see
Life's radiance and its ceaseless ecstasy.

A MURMUR IN THE GRASS

O PALE-LIPPED blossom
Why do you sigh?
" For the many million
Times I must die
Ere I be as that glory
Up in the sky."

Your sisters with beauty
Are satisfied.
Is it not envy
Dreams of such pride?
" No there is nothing
To life denied.

" It would be unjust,
Unjust, if we
Could dream of a beauty
We might not be.
Life is becoming
All we see.

"I shall rise from the grass,
I shall fill all the blue,
And I shall be blossom
And fire and dew
In the boundlessness
We travel through."

THE LONELY

Lone and forgotten
Through a long sleeping,
In the heart of age
A child woke weeping.

No invisible mother
Was nigh him there
Laughing and nodding
From earth and air.

No elfin comrades
Came at his call,
And the earth and the air
Were blank as a wall.

The darkness thickened
Upon him creeping,
In the heart of age
A child lay weeping.

THE ETERNAL LOVERS

WHIRLED on their starry Odyssey
From heaven to earth, in this deep glade
The eternal lovers hold their court
Within the heart of man and maid.

That darkness throbs with hidden fire:
The pulse beats fast: the heavens call:
Earth is transfigured, and the twain
Breathe as they did before the Fall.

When King and Queen feast in the heart
They squander all the gold of years
To make their banquet gay, then leave
A ruined heart, a house of tears.

A DREAM OF DEFEATED BEAUTY

All day they played in gardens hid amid golden towers
That made the blue burn deeper above their world of flowers.
Within their dream-girt gardens the pools drank in the sky
And the light laughing figures that flamed or fluttered by.
There lute or harp string sounded from noon to eventide,
And every voice that murmured a mirror was to pride.
All day on light and music the young queen feasted deep:
Her happy heart foretelling the hour of love and sleep,
When he unto whose glory the earth made sacrifice
Would give all to make richer the dark of lovely eyes.
Within her palace chamber the purple slumbrous shade
At midnight slowly lightened where the young queen was laid;

And moonlight marbled over flower foam
and jewel sheen
And carved in pearl and mystery the white
limbs of the queen.
The young queen smiled in slumber as if
in dream she knew
What dragons chained lay sleeping: what
horns for battle blew:
And who would bow the genii from thrones
of blinding fire
To send their airy children to dance at her
desire.
The young queen paled in slumber as if she
there had known
A majesty unbending on some unconquered
throne.
Where had she soared in slumber? And
who was this who came
Making the dusk all starry with plumes of
magic flame?
Who mourned in lofty sorrow above the
body's pride
" This Babylon that I have built " and bowed
its head and sighed.

MERCHANDISE OF LIGHT

Was it not worth the farewell to the sun,
O caravan of rays through desert space,
To bear the image of this lovely face?
Now hurry with the beauty you have won.
Where shall it not be known when you have run
The shining leagues to your appointed place,
And far and starry hamlets know that grace,
So from the light new beauty may be spun?
Marvel of animate ivory and fire!
Proud head upcast with heaven-assailing gaze
As if for flight! Nay, nay, you need not wings
To reach the sky; for, elder to desire,
Your image scatters on a million rays
And, quivering with that beauty, aether sings.

HEREAFTER

Although the merchant be your care
The mart or field, do not forget—
To leave a glory on the air
When the red Gaelic sun has set—

Some prophet must have cried a word
The hurrying world will pause to hear.
Even for the unfaltering sword
No one will hold your memory dear.

The Greece of Pericles is cold:
Yet still there shines beyond its seas
The wisdom Diotima told
In the rapt ear of Socrates.

WASTE

All that heroic mood,
The will to suffer pain,
Were it on beauty spent,
An intellectual gain:

Had a fierce pity breathed
O'er wronged or fallen life,
Though strife had been unwise
We were not shamed by strife:

Had they but died for some
High image in the mind,
Not spilt the sacrifice
For words hollow as wind!

Darkened the precious fire:
The will we honour most
Spent in the waste! What sin
Against the Holy Ghost!

WATCHERS

My heart grew ice because of that grim head,
Red sparking eyes alert for pounce or flight,
Features miscarven by strange appetite,
Till kinship with the Elohim was dead,
And kestrel, snake and rat were in their
stead,
Glaring through eyeholes that let in no light,
Slinking through corridors made black as
night,
The paths the heavenly hierarchies should
tread.
A company of starry ones without
That midnight wait on the lost wanderer,
The hero whom these demon things immure.
The shining ones make answer to my doubt,
" Our Lord is buried in this sepulchre.
We wait His resurrection. It is sure! "

A PRISONER

Brixton, September 1920

See, though the oil be low, more purely still
and higher
The flame burns in the body's lamp. The
watchers still
Gaze with unseeing eyes while the Promethean will,
The Uncreated Light, the Everlasting Fire,
Sustain themselves against the torturer's desire,
Even as the fabled Titan chained upon the
hill.
Burn on, shine here, thou immortality, until
We too can light our lamps at the funereal
pyre;
Till we too can be noble, unshakeable, undismayed;
Till we too can burn with the holy flame, and
know
There is that within us can conquer the
dragon pain,
And go to death alone, slowly and unafraid.

The candles of God already are burning row
on row:
Farewell, light-bringer; fly to thy fountain
again.

A LOST DREAM

The unleashed air,
A wild cold animal,
Hunts on the hills.

Yet the hollow amid the rocks
Is brimful of quiet,
So quiet
Faery may be heard:
So still
There is not a flicker
In the candle of dream.

The warm East
Is at my feet.
In burning blue
Lagoon beyond lagoon
Faints shimmering,
All lotus besprinkled—
Rose lotuses!

A woman leans,
A dream out of Allah.
The water quivers
In ivory ringlets

Beneath her fingers
As she plucks the blossom she twines
In the dark shining of her hair.

She stands;
Stillness in ivory!
But ere I see her eyes,
Ere I make them mine,
The wild cold animal
Leaps into the hollow.
The candle flickers and is blown;
The paths all are darkened.
A dream has lost its way to life.

MICHAEL

A WIND blew by from icy hills,
Shook with cold breath the daffodils,
And shivered as with silver mist
The lake's pale leaden amethyst.
It pinched the barely budded trees
And rent the twilight tapestries:
Left for one hallowed instant bare
A single star in lonely air
O'er rocky fields the bitter wind
Had swept of all their human kind.

Ere that the fisher folk were all
Snug under thatch and sheltering wall
Breathing the cabin's air of gold
Safe from blue storm and nipping cold.
And, clustered round the hearth within
With fiery hands and burnished chin,
They sat and listened to old tales
Or legends of gigantic gales.
Some told of phantom craft they knew
That sailed with a flame-coloured crew,
And came up strangely through the wind
Havens invisible to find

By those rare cities poets sung
Cresting the Islands of the Young.

How do the heights above our head,
The depths below the water spread,
Waken the spirit in such wise
That to the deep the deep replies,
And in far spaces of the soul
The oceans stir, the heavens roll?

Michael must leave the morrow morn
The countryside where he was born,
And all day long had Michael clung
Unto the kin he lived among.
But at some talk of sea and sky
He heard an older mother cry.
The cabin's golden air grew dim:
The cabin's walls drew down on him:
The cabin's rafters hid from sight
The cloudy roof-tree of the night.
And Michael could not leave behind
His kinsmen of the wave and wind
Without farewell. The path he took
Ran like a twisted, shining brook,
Speckled with stones and ruts and rills,
Mid a low valley of dark hills.
And trees so tempest bowed that they
Seemed to seek double root in clay.
At last the dropping valley turned:
A sky of murky citron burned,

Above through flying purples seen
Lay pools of heavenly blue and green.
From the sea rim unto the caves
Rolled on a mammoth herd of waves.
And all about the rocky bay
Leaped up grey forests of wild spray,
Glooming above the ledges brown
Ere their pale drift came drenching down.

Things delicate and dewy clung
To Michael's cheeks. The salt air stung.
From crag to crag did Michael leap
Until he overhung the deep;
Saw in vast caves the waters roam,
The ceaseless ecstasy of foam,
Whirlpools of opal, lace of light
Strewn over quivering malachite,
Ice-tinted mounds of water rise,
Glinting as with a million eyes,
Reel in and out of light and shade,
Show depths of ivory or jade,
New broidery every instant wear
Spun by the magic weaver, Air.
Then Michael's gaze was turned from these
Unto the far, rejoicing seas
Whose twilight legions onward rolled
A turbulence of dusky gold,
A dim magnificence of froth,
A thunder tone which was not wrath,
But such a speech as earth might cry
Unto far kinsmen in the sky.

The spray was tossed aloft in air:
A bird was flying here and there.
Foam, bird and twilight to the boy
Seemed to be but a single joy.
He closed his eyes that he might be
Alone with all that ecstasy.

What was it unto Michael gave
This joy, the life of earth and wave?
Or did his candle shine so bright
But by its own and natural light?
Ah, who can answer for what powers
Are with us in the secret hours!
Though wind and wave cried out no less,
Entranced unto forgetfulness,
He heard no more the water's din;
A golden ocean rocked within,
A boat of bronze and crystal wrought
And steered by the enchanter, Thought,
Was flying with him fast and far
To isles that glimmered, each a star
Hung low upon the distant rim,
And then the vision rushed on him.

The palaces of light were there
With towers that faded up in air,
With amethyst and silver spires,
And casements lit with precious fires,
And mythic forms with wings outspread
And faces from which light was shed

High upon gleaming pillars set
On turret and on parapet.
The bells were chiming all around
And the sweet air was drunk with sound.

Too swift did Michael pass to see
Ildathach's mystic chivalry
Graved on the walls, its queens and kings
Girt round with eyes and stars and wings.
The magic boat with Michael drew
To some deep being that he knew,
Some mystery that to the wise
Is clouded o'er by Paradise,
Some will that would not let him stay
Hurried the boat away, away.
At last its fiery wings were still
Folded beneath some heavenly hill.
But was that Michael light as air
Was travelling up the mighty stair?
Or had impetuous desire
Woven for him that form of fire
Which with no less a light did shine
Than those with countenance divine
Who thronged the gateway as he came,
Faces of rapture and of flame,
The glowing, deep, unwavering eyes
Of those eternity makes wise.
And lofty things to him were said
As to one risen from the dead.

What there beyond the gate befell
Michael could never after tell.

Imagination still would fail
Some height too infinite to scale,
Some being too profound to scan,
Some time too limitless to span.
Yet when he lifted up his eyes
That foam was grey against the skies.
That same wild bird was on the wing.
That twilight wave was glimmering.
And twilight wave and foam and bird
Had hardly in his vision stirred.
Since he had closed his eyes to be
Of that majestic company.

And can a second then suffice
To hurry us to Paradise,
What seemed so endlessly sublime
Shrink to a particle of time?
Why was the call on Michael made?
What charge was on his spirit laid?
And could the way for him be sure
Made by excess of light obscure?
However fiery is the dream,
How faint in life the echoing gleam!
And faint was all that happed that day
As home he went his dreamy way.

And now has Michael, for his share
Of life, the city's dingy air,
By the black reek of chimneys smudged
O'er the dark warehouse where he drudged,

Where for dull life men pay in toll
Toil and the shining of the soul.
Within his attic he would fret
Like a wild creature in a net,
And on the darkness he would make
The jewel of a little lake,
A bloom of fairy blue amid
The bronze and purple heather hid;
Make battlemented cliffs grow red
Where the last rose of day was shed,
Be later in rich darkness seen
Against a sky of glowing green.
Or he would climb where quiet fills
With dream the shepherd on the hills,
Where he could see as from high land
The golden sickle of the sand
Curving around the bay to where
The granite cliffs were worn by air,
And watch the wind and waves at play,
The heavenly gleam of falling spray.
The sunlit surges foam below
In wrinklings as of liquid snow.
And he could breathe the airs that blew
From worlds invisible he knew.
How far away now from the boy!
How unassailable their joy!

So Michael would recall each place
As lovers a remembered face.
But, though the tender may not tire,
Memory is but a fading fire.

And Michael's might have sunken low,
Changed to grey ash its coloured glow,
Did not upon his hearing fall
The mountain speech of Donegal,
And that he swiftly turned to greet
The tongue whose accent was so sweet,
And found one of that eager kind
The army of the Gaelic mind,
Still holding through the Iron Age
The spiritual heritage,
The story from the gods that ran
Through many a cycle down to man.
And soon with them had Michael read
The legend of the famous dead,
From him who with his single sword
Stayed a great army at the ford,
Down to the vagrant poets, those
Who gave their hearts to the Dark Rose,
And of the wanderers who set sail
And found a lordlier Innisfail,
And saw a sun that never set
And all their hearts' desires were met.

How may the past if it be dead
Its light within the living shed?
Or does the Everliving hold
Earth's memories from the Age of Gold?
And are our dreams, ardours and fires
But ancient unfulfilled desires?
And do they shine within our clay
And do they urge us on their way?

As Michael read the Gaelic scroll
It seemed the story of the soul,
And those who wrought, lest there should fail,
From earth the legend of the Gael,
Seemed warriors of Eternal Mind,
Still holding in a world grown blind,
From which belief and hope had gone,
The lovely magic of its dawn.

Thrice on the wheel of time recurred
The season of the risen Lord
Since Michael left his home behind
And faced the chilly Easter wind,
And saw the twilight waters gleam
And dreamed an unremembered dream.
Was it because the Easter time
With mystic nature was in chime
That memory was roused from sleep,
Or was deep calling unto deep?
The lord in man had risen here,
From the dark sepulchre of fear,
Was laughing, gay and undismayed,
Though on a fragile barricade
The bullet rang, the death star broke,
The street waved dizzily in smoke,
And there the fierce and lovely breath
Of flame in the grey mist was death.

Yet Michael felt within him rise
The rapture that is sacrifice.

What miracle was wrought on him
So that each leaden freighted limb
Seemed lit with fire, seemed light as air?
How came upon him dying there
Amid the city's burning piles
The vision of the mystic isles?
For underneath and through the smoke
A glint of golden waters broke;
And floating on that phantom tide
With fiery wings expanded wide
A barque of bronze and crystal wrought
Called forth by the enchanter, Thought.
And noble faces glowed above,
Faces of ecstasy and love,
And eyes whose shining calm and pure
Was in eternity secure,
And lofty forms of burnished air
Stood on the deck by Michael there.
And spirit upon spirit gazed,
And one to Michael's lips upraised
A cup filled from that holy well
O'er which the Nuts of Wisdom fell,
And as he drank there reeled away
Vision of earth and night and day,
And he was far away from these
Afloat upon the heavenly seas.

I do not know if such a band
Came from the Many Coloured Land
Or whether in our being we
Make such a magic phantasy

Of images which draw us hence
Unto our own magnificence.
Yet many a one a tryst has kept
With the immortal while he slept,
Woke unremembering, went his way,
Life seemed the same from day to day,
Till the predestined hour came,
A hidden will leaped up in flame,
And through its deed the risen soul
Strides on self-conquering to the goal.

This was the dream of one who died
For country, said his countryside.
We choose this cause or that, but still
The Everlasting works Its will.
The slayer and the slain may be
Knit in a secret harmony.
What does the spirit urge us to?
Some sacrifice that may undo
The bonds that hold us to the clay
And limit life to this cold day?
Some for a gentle dream will die:
Some for an empire's majesty:
Some for a loftier humankind,
Some to be free as cloud or wind,
Will leave their valley, climb their slope.
Whate'er the deed, whate'er the hope,
Through all the varied battle-cries
A Shepherd with a single voice
Still lures us nigh the Gates of Gold
That open to the Starry Fold.

So it may be that Michael died
For some far other countryside,
Than that grey Ireland he had known,
Yet on his dream of it was thrown
Some light from that consuming Fire
Which is the end of all desire.
If men adore It as the power
Empires and cities tower on tower
Are built in worship by the way
High Babylon or Nineveh.
Seek It as love and there may be
A Golden Age and Arcady.
All shadows are they of one thing
To which all life is journeying.

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